

Wychavon DC – deputy chief executive

Wychavon DC may be a small council, but it has big ideas and huge ambitions. Innovative and entrepreneurial, it is an organisation with drive and commitment that runs through the officers and members alike.

Set on the southern edge of the West Midlands, Wychavon – with its thriving market towns and villages – was recently named as the best place to live in the region but the district council is striving to make it better.

Chief executive designate, Vic Allison explains: 'The attitude of the council is very aspirational. We have just agreed our four-year strategy and it is very ambitious.'

He is about to take on the post of chief executive of both Wychavon and its partnering Malvern Hills DC, following the retirement of former managing director Jack Hegarty. The two authorities have a joint management structure, with a deputy chief executive for each council and Mr Allison is looking for a deputy chief executive to fill his previous post.

'It is a unique post,' he says. 'It is part of the joint management team, but it is 100% Wychavon. It is the role of the chief financial officer, but the post is so much broader than that. We are looking for an accountant, who is not just an accountant.'

It is a role that will give the successful candidate the chance to be creative and innovative in shaping the local area, covering the rural economy and the three market towns of Pershore, Droitwich Spa and Evesham.

'During my time in the role, I spent more time on property development, creating commercial opportunities and putting deals together than anything else. It is a fascinating job if you want to make things happen,' Mr Allison tells *The MJ*.

But he is adamant that this is not just commercial investment for the sake of it. The council has a strict policy of developing for the benefit of the community.

'We don't buy shopping centres for a return. We don't buy outside the district,' he says. 'If we invest it is so



we can make a difference. It has to be in the district and it has to support the community or the local economy.'

Investments so far have seen the council build two Waitrose supermarkets, which have helped support two of the district's town centres and attracted further private investment. When the National Health Service opted to close the

local cottage hospital, the council stepped in to build a new one.

And there is more to come. The council has plans to build housing for rent and for railway station car parks to ensure sustainable transport systems to support new housing.

'These investments will give us a good financial return, and they will make a difference,' Mr Allison

says. 'We are proud of that and we want to do more. We want someone with commercial awareness to join us. This post is about finding those opportunities. Where the private sector is not delivering, the deputy chief executive is the person who can intervene and make it happen.'

As well as spending a lot of their time on development, the new deputy chief executive will be section 151 officer and lead on a range of business-critical services including IT, HR & OD, procurement, property, strategy and communications.

The role will be central to the council's transformation and change programme and the successful candidate will need to be innovative and creative when it comes to finding better and more efficient ways of delivering services.

'We are looking for someone who is working at director level in a district, or assistant director at a larger authority, and they have to be a qualified accountant,' Mr Allison

says. 'But it is important that they have an attitude that centres around making things happen and a strong desire to change things.'

When it comes to the organizational environment, all the building blocks are in place. With a friendly, positive and proactive management team and supportive members who encourage innovation, Mr Allison says it is a 'great place to work'.

'We have worked hard to think about different ways of working,' he adds.

And while the coronavirus crisis has thrown everyone into uncertainty, Wychavon is financially stable with relatively healthy reserves.

The town centres – of Pershore, Droitwich and Evesham – may need some support in the post-COVID recovery, but the council is in a good position to be able to deliver it.

'We have the resources and the ambition to make a difference to the lives of the people in Wychavon,' Mr Allison says. 'It really is a special place to work.' ■



Vic Allison, Joint Chief Executive Designate, Wychavon District Council & Malvern Hills District Council